

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF CANCER BIOLOGY
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March 18, 1985

Dr. Harold Varmus
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Dear Harold:

Thank you for your letter of March 4th. I agree to serve on the committee. I must admit, however, that I am not optimistic that a consensus will be reached very easily.

I might also add that the issue of what to call the new sub-human primate viruses might also be worth including in the deliberations. I'm not referring to the Mason-Pfizer or the numerous endogenous retroviruses originally described by Benveniste and Todaro. Rather, I refer to the HTLV-I related viruses of many Old World monkeys that were discovered by Miyoshi and subsequently shown by us to be linked to leukemia development as well as the HTLV-III/LAV related viruses that we just recently found in macaques (preprints enclosed; please keep this latter information confidential). It is now clear that both the HTLV-I type agents and the AIDS type agents are rather widespread in sub-human primates as well. They are currently called PTLV's, MTLV's and STLV's. No name seems ideal. Fortunately, however, it is neither as important nor as emotional as the issue of what to call the human viruses. Yet, the amount of literature on these agents is bound to increase and it would be nice if readers not intimately involved could make some sense out of it.

I might also add that Bill Haseltine is in the process of considering a proposal to designate many of these viruses (along with BLV and perhaps certain lentiviruses such as visna) as T-type because of the transactivation mechanism that is mediated by the x/lor region of the genome. You thus might also want to consider having him as another interested "non-member" of your subcommittee. I think it is fairly likely that he will submit a multi-authored proposal along these lines in the near future, and if he does it could make that issue moot. As you know, this is in effect what happened with the HTLV/ALTV issue when Robin Weiss circulated his proposal at the Cold Spring Harbor meeting.

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It would indeed be refreshing if a bit more calm and logic could be brought to bear on the situation. I expect to be in San Francisco on Monday, June 3rd. If you will also be there at that time perhaps we can meet briefly to discuss these and other items of mutual interest. As you may know, we have become increasingly interested in the HBV's, particularly in relation to the infection of cells of the lymphoid/myeloid lineage. I had hoped to get to your (and Jesse's) CSH meeting on this but I have a conflict at that time. Two junior people from my group will be there to discuss some of this work.

Personal regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Max", with a large, sweeping initial "M".

M. Essex

Enclosures

ME/jgk